

Henry Chatham Houses  
106-08 N. Pitt Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-680

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
161-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## HENRY CHATHAM HOUSES

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VA  
7-ALEX,  
161-

Location: 106-08 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: Demolished in 1968 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: Built by a man who held considerable real estate in Alexandria, the double house represents the Italianate influence in the town's architecture at mid-nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Mid-nineteenth century. On June 3, 1854, W. C. Yeaton and wife, and W. Arthur Taylor and wife, conveyed to Henry Chatham, for \$2,000, the following lot of ground:

Begin on the west side of Pitt Street, between King and Cameron Streets, 78 feet north of King Street; Go west parallel to King Street 44 feet to a line formerly known as Thompson and Vietch's; Go North parallel to Pitt Street 34 feet to an 8 foot alley; Go east on the alley 44 feet to Pitt Street; Go south on Pitt Street to the beginning.

Yeaton and Taylor purchased this property from Betsey C. Mason, executrix, widow and devisee of Thomson F. Mason on February 18, 1853, for \$1,500. Neither of these conveyances mentions buildings or improvements. Apparently the lot was unimproved when Thomson F. Mason purchased it in 1832, when, for \$1,500, he purchased this property and another lot of ground "whereon stand five tenements." Presumably if the Pitt Street lot had been improved, the deed would have so stated, since the five tenements on the other lot conveyed in the same deed are referred to.

Although the building, later known as 106-08 N. Pitt Street, may have been built by Yeaton and Taylor, it would seem that in that case the property would have increased in value more than the \$500 additional they received when they sold it to Chatham.

Henry Chatham's will was recorded on January 3, 1866. After a few specific bequests, Chatham directed that the remainder of his property be divided equally among his three married daughters and their descendants.

In the partition of Chatham's estate, on December 9, 1869, Chatham's daughter Fanny, wife of John A. Dixon, received, among other property:

House (sic) and lot on the west side of Pitt Street 78 feet north of King, then north 34 feet to an eight foot alley, extending west 44 feet.

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: Henry Chatham was the first owner. His daughter, Fanny Chatham Dixon was the second owner. On March 20, 1899, the heirs of Fanny Chatham Dixon executed a deed of partition. The house left Fanny by this time had become 106 and 108 N. Pitt Street. The property at 106 N. Pitt Street went to Fanny's grandson, Gordon Thomas, only child of Ella Dixon Thomas, deceased, and was described as:

Beginning on the west side of Pitt Street 77 feet 8 inches north of King Street at the north line of an alley 3 feet wide extending 23 feet west from Pitt Street;

Then go north on Pitt Street 17 feet 5 inches to the middle of the partition wall between the house hereby conveyed and the house adjoining on the north;

West parallel to King Street 53 feet 10 inches;

South parallel to Pitt Street 17 feet 5 inches;

East parallel to King Street 53 feet 10 inches to the beginning.

(Note change in boundaries as result of a survey.)

The conveyance also grants Gordon Thomas the right "to lay a terra-cotta or iron pipe from the cellar of the house hereby conveyed to the well in the cellar of the house adjoining on the north /108 N. Pitt Street/ for the purpose of draining the same," and the right "to keep it in repair and for that purpose to enter the cellar of the house adjoining on the north whenever it may be necessary."

The house and lot at 108 N. Pitt Street were conveyed to Fanny Dixon, daughter of Fanny Chatham Dixon and John Dixon, subject to the right of the owner of 106 N. Pitt Street to lay and keep in repair the pipe in the cellar referred to above.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Henry Chatham owned quite a bit of real estate in Alexandria, but at this point in our research we do not know what his profession or business was. His obituary, appearing in the Alexandria Gazette of December 30, 1865, is not helpful:

DIED

On the 29th inst., Mr. HENRY CHATHAM, in the 85th year of his age; one of our oldest and most respected citizens. He was a native of this place, and has resided here all his life. The friends and acquaintances of the family are invited to attend the funeral to-morrow (Sunday) from his late residence, corner of Pitt and Cameron streets, at 2½ o'clock p.m.

C. Bibliography:

Alexandria Deed Books Q-3, p. 170, O-3, p. 363; U-2, p. 49; A-4, p. 74, 43, p. 514; Alexandria Will Book 8, p. 299. Issues of the Alexandria Gazette as cited.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The double building has been decorated with Italianate entrance and roof cornices.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, six bays
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick, common bond
3. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Each doorway shares a common cast-iron step.
4. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The doorways of the twin buildings are adjoining, as if denoting the center of the entirety. Each is topped by a molded cornice supported by elaborate consoles and framed by pilasters.
  - b. Windows and shutters: The windows at the first floor are elongated, four-over-four light, marked at the top by pointed lintels. (The first floor windows of 108 N. Pitt have been replaced by a modern commercial

shop window.) The windows at the second story are two-over-two light with pointed lintels. Louvered shutters survive and flank the second floor windows of 108 N. Pitt.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Shed
- b. Cornice, eaves: A raised roofline, actually a parapet, gives a false sense of height to the building. The cornice protrudes and is supported by brackets with drops. The long sides of the brackets extend beyond the entablature.

C. Description of Interior:

Side-hall plans.

D. Site:

The building faces west along Pitt Street.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of  
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Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings of downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.